

[The Back-Date Buggy]

Approximately 1,871 Words

SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: THE BACK-DATE BUGGY

Date of First Writing March 23, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Mr. Berkeley Grice

Fictitious Name Berkeley Lawrimore

Address Marion, S.C. (Rural)

Place Marion County

Occupation Farming

Name of Writer Annie Ruth Davis [?] S. C. Box. 2

Project #3613

Annie Ruth Davis

Marion, S.C.

March 23, 1939 THE BACK-DATE BUGGY MARION COUNTY SOUTH CAROLINA

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Berkeley Lawrimore and his wife live alone in a small frame house, overlooking Dusty Hills Golf Course, three miles east of Marion. They are both farmers, one might say, for they share together the work that must be done to make a living on their ten acres of farming land.

As the little dwelling of the Lawrimores was approached on this windy March afternoon, the entire surroundings were filled with intense quiet. Only the wind seemed to stir the stillness as it swept over the fields, rustled in the trees, and kept the limber-necked jonquilies, scattered about the front yard, bobbing back and forth with [it's?] breeze.

But on intruding to the back of the house, the quiet was broken by the clucking of hens walking lazily about the premises, the mooing of a cow in [it's?] stall nearby, and the shrill echo of a bobwhite from the distant woods beyond. Advancing yet a little nearer to a large barn, standing about fifty yards behind the house, a mumbling of voices seemed to come from some hidden spot within. Just at that moment, Berkeley Lawrimore stepped out from beneath the shed of 2 the barn pulling an old time buggy with him. He was followed by his wife, Nettie, pushing the buggy from behind as it rolled into the open. Standing off from their decrepit old vehicle, the Lawrimores looked up in astonishment to find that they were not alone.

Berkeley Lawrimore, a man of average size, with a farmer's brown skin, light blue eyes, sandy mustache and hair of shaggy lengths, was dressed in a dingy blue work shirt, blue overalls, and a tattered black felt hat. His wife, a small woman with brown hair and eyes, a little round face, and sunburned complexion, offered a less careless appearance. She wore a spotted print dress, homespun apron, tiny black felt hat, and brown sweater.

"Our old buggy's got to looking so shabby, we're fixing to scrape all that hard mud off that's stuck on it and paint it over new for Easter," explained Nettie Lawrimore. "We want to try and get it done while the weather's favorable, but if you don't mind to sit out here to the lot, Berkeley can talk to you while he's scraping them spokes to that wheel. He loves to talk so

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good, he don't never turn down no chance he gets." Nettie Lawrimore goes to the house and comes back dragging a home-made straight chair with a cowhide bottom. "This chair's not none the best, but it's better than getting your coat all mussed up on that straw over there."

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"Yes, we've got a pretty nice little farm here, but being uneducated, I wouldn't hardly know how to impart to you what part of the business I ought to speak of," began Berkeley Lawrimore. "Now, tush! tush! I've done spoke a error to you first thing. I don't own a foot of land to my name. My wife bought these ten acres of land and built that four-room house yonder with a part of the fourteen hundred dollars that come to her on the death of her father. She give fifty-eight dollars a acre for this land and paid six hundred dollars for the house. It's good land and there's not but one objection I've got to it - it's headquarters for the mischief down here with that swimming pool and golf course cross yonder. You know, where there's one eternal whirl by a house, it's bothering to a old man sixty-nine years old.

"Take a poor fellow like me, I've been handicapped ever since I've been big enough to know the right and wrong of a thing. My father owned 1800 acres of farming land and if he hadn't been so soft-hearted, I might've been a wealthy man today. But to favor a friend, pa endorsed a note for him worth \$18,000 and soon after his death, his property was sold to settle that man's debt. Yes, I've got papers in my trunk right yonder in the house now to prove them words - can show them to you in a pair of minutes. And since then I've seen that man's daughter a-driving around town in a big limousine and me a-walking the streets a pauper. Now, they tell me, she's keeping a little boarding house to make a living.

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"When my father died, I was just a lad twelve years old and how-come I never did get no higher than the fourth grade. I always wanted to expound the scriptures, but being uneducated, I couldn't do it. My boyhood days were spent in absolute slavery for I had to work by the hardest to help my brother take care of my mother and sister. My brother

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thought he could pay the debt off the farm, but poor boy, he fell dead behind the plough - lightning struck him one evening just about laying off time. I was sixteen years old then and the farm was sold from under us before the year was out. We moved to town and as long as my mother lived and my sister stayed single, I eked out a living for them working about on clerking jobs as best I could for twenty dollars a month. Yes, I sacrificed the, prime of my manhood for my widowed mother and baby sister.

"The year after my mother died, I married my old girl over there and wouldn't take a million dollars for her today. You see, when we got married, I was without money, without learning, deep in debt, and out of doors, but we've made a pretty good go of life together. We started out a-sharefarming on a little place down next Tabernacle and kept on a-moving in that line for the next twenty-five years. We always had a mind to try our luck on a new spot of land and never did stay but a couple of years to a place. That's the sharecropper's style, you know. Considering a man ain't got a scattering of dirt to his name, sharefarming's a blessing, but there ain't no more'n a bare living in it for a honest man like me.

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"We don't make no big-to-do of farming here on Nettie's little spot of land, but it's good enough for a humble old couple like me and Nettle. Yes'm, It's just a one-horse farm. See our old gray mare a-peeping through them cracks yonder? She's all the help we have except for the hiring of a few Niggers in cotton picking time. But there's not one foot of land in all these ten acres that's wasted. We plant three acres of cotton - that's the limit on my government card - five acres of corn, one-half acre of peas for reseeding and hay purposes, one-half acre in a garden, and the other half acre is under our house and yard yonder, chicken yard, and this here feed barn. But we can plant cabbage between cotton and irish potatoes grows between corn.

"We buy our fertilizer from the Marion Oil Mill and do our own mixing. Put six hundred pounds to the acre of such grade of fertilizer as acid, nitrate of potash, soda and cotton

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seed meal. We've got a guano distributor, that hay rake over there, and a few turnplows, but that's about the limit of our farming equipment.

"Last year, we made two bales of cotton that sold for \$38.70 a bale, twenty bushels of corn to the acre, twelve bushels of peas, and ten bushels of potatoes - just enough for our own use. And being such back-date folks, we's still a-pulling fodder. The cultivation of tobacco employs most farmers so greatly today that they find it cheaper to plant 6 pea vines that take the place of fodder."

"Pulling fodder's hot work in the summer time, interrupted Nettie.

"Then my wife, she makes a kind of living selling such as: eggs, chickens, butter, vegetables, strawberries, blackberries, and huckleberries to the curb market in town. She ain't been making but eight dollars a month lately, just having a few eggs to sell, but she has sold as high as twenty dollars a month. Reckon we've got seventy to eighty head of chickens. Now, would you like to know what breed we carry? Well, I calls them a Duke's mixture - Rhode Island Reds, Barred Rocks, and Country Game. We have two cows, too, and Nettie makes a right smart of butter and buttermilk, but there's a law against country folks selling sweet milk in town. They claim that's done to protect the dairies, but we's the ones that's needing the protecting. If you could see me and Nettie going to town soon of a morning with our old gray horse and broke down buggy, you'd likely wonder where them poor back-date folks come from.

"Now, is there anything in the bird line that interest you? I've got a nice line of birds over there - the purple martins. We generally have forty to sixty purple martins and that's what I've got thirty-two gourds erected up on them two high poles for. You see, I have every other gourd turned backwards and forwards. That's to keep them from 7 getting in a tangle with one another. They come from Brazil and make their appearance bare the first of every March. Then they leave this portion of the country about the last of September. If they don't find them gourds up there when they come back in the spring, they'll run all around

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here just a-talking in their bird-like way till I put them up. They're a guard against the hawk and the blue dauber - best known in the South as the barn robber.

“Hold on a minute! I've runned over so much nonsense in my unlearned way of talking, I forgot to tell you about my boy, Charlie. He's a-working in Washington - got his education at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. Now, I'll have to tell you how he come of it. He was so bent on getting a learning, Nettie give him a start off with a portion of the fourteen hundred dollars her pa left her. Then a rich lady in Columbia loaned him enough money to go the balance of the time. He met her through some friends and she just taken a fancy to him. He explained to her how he wanted to finish school and she didn't deny him. She told him, 'You've got a honest face on you.' She just taken chances on him, a stranger. That's why he ought to appreciate it all the more and he does to the highest. Yes, he carried her a seven dollar and a half wreath of flowers the last time he come home from Washington. He's been a-working in Washington three 8 years and he's done paid that lady off, bought a three hundred acre farm to Tabernacle, and my wife holds a five thousand dollar life insurance policy he's a-carrying. Now, you see who holds the purse strings. Charlie told me what he's doing up there in Washington the last time he come home, but being uneducated, I wouldn't dare to try to explain it to you - just know he's a chemist.

“But let me tell you one more thing that's brought joy to my heart. Dr. Joe Evans, one of my old boyhood friends, come to see me the other day. He's visited every country around the world and come back to see a little numskull like me that don't know enough to go in when it rains. Now, how could such a clodhopper as me interest a man that's got the world's experience? It's 'cause I'm plain and Joe Evans is plain. That's how-come he don't mind coming back to see me a poor fellow a-living in a little humble hut and hugging my neck. Yes, you can tell what a back-date we is a-riding in a vehicle drawn by a horse and known as a buggy.”